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NEWS RELEASE

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KENNEDY SEEKS SANCTIONS AGAINST INDONESIA UNLESS VIOLENCE IN EAST TIMOR CEASES

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WASHINGTON -- Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy (D-RI) introduced a resolution today urging that all military assistance and arms transfers to Indonesia be prohibited until that government brings an end to the paramilitary violence against the people of East Timor.

The resolution, co-sponsored by Congressman Tom Lantos (D-CA) and Congresswomen Nita Lowey (D-NY) and Cynthia McKinney (D-GA), calls for U.S. arms and military sanctions on Indonesia and other governments if they continue to arm civilian military troops. It also calls for certification that Indonesia is granting access to East Timor for United Nations monitors and a reduction in the presence of troops in East Timor as stipulated in a tentative peace agreement on April 21, which is expected to be signed today.

"Despite the agreement for a cease-fire by East Timorese resistance representatives, paramilitaries and military commanders in East Timor, this paramilitary terrorism has not lessened," said Kennedy.

Kennedy is one of the most outspoken members of Congress in condemning the human rights' atrocities committed by the Indonesian government against the predominately Catholic people of East Timor, a former colony of Portugal. More than 200,000 people have perished since the Indonesian occupation in 1975. Violence against the pro-independence forces has escalated in recent weeks.

"It has been documented that the Indonesian government has not only been standing by watching the recent massacres, but also facilitating and arming them," Kennedy stated. "These militias, who oppose any attempt to break away from Indonesian rule, distributed threatening leaflets carrying a list of people to be beaten and outlining steps to crush pro-independence sentiment."

The intent of the paramilitary forces, according the Kennedy, is to undermine the balloting planned for this summer to give the people of East Timor their independence.

Kennedy will seek a sense of Congress that the U.S. will prohibit military assistance and arms transfers unless the government of Indonesia meets the following stipulations:

- It no longer arms, finances or supports paramilitary units in East Timor.
- It has assisted in the successful disarming and disbanding of the paramilitary units in East Timor.
- It allows free and open access to East Timor to a continuing United Nations presence.
- It has substantially reduced the military troop presence in East Timor.

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"We need to support the decision to let Timor's people choose between autonomy and independence," said Kennedy. "The threat by the United States to cut off military assistance and arms transfers should serve to get the attention of the Indonesian government."

Kennedy and other House and Senate members recently sent letters to President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, calling upon the U.S. government to encourage the improvement of human rights and the ceasing of the armament of paramilitary troops in East Timor.

Kennedy unveiled the resolution at a Capitol Hill press conference today, along with Senators Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Russell Feingold (D-WI), who introduced similar legislation in the Senate.

Yesterday, Kennedy chaired a House Human Rights Caucus discussion of the situation in East Timor, along with Congresswoman McKinney.

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